

Inaugural Address by West Virginia Governor Jim Justice (D)
January 16, 2017

Well, got all my papers here. And what an incredible day. So, please seat – sit – please. You know, it's phenomenal to think about it. How could we have weather like this on this day? What an incredible holiday. Martin Luther King. What unbelievable memories. What unbelievable contribution.

You know, I'm just going to take time to thank a few, but I am so humbled and thankful to be standing in front of you. You know, I thank my family. I do truly believe you'll have a better first lady than you'll have a governor. And the only thing that was probably the toughest of the day was this: "Wind Beneath my Wings" was sang at my dad's funeral. And, uh, I miss my mom and dad like crazy and I know they're watching and I know they're smiling, and they're probably saying, "What on earth are you doing?"

But I got so many friends and family here. My ball teams! I want ya'll to just think the trip to Charleston wasn't all that hard, was it? We'd like to see you back in a few weeks. Let me say that there are really special friends here who are contributing or have contributed to our state beyond belief. Governor Tomblin. Senator Manchin. Senator Capito. And many others. And I'm not going to go through everybody else but I appreciate you beyond all comprehension.

And let me tell you this - today we'll have a little bit different speech. I'll speak to you directly from my heart. You see in my life, I really run the same play over and over. First, is the Good Lord. Second is my family. Third are my co-workers. And fourth are kids. And then I run the play over. Over and over. I want absolutely nothing. Nothing. I don't want a thing for me or my family in any way. All I want is goodness for this incredible state and its incredible people.

Florine Warden, a person who a lot of people would have thought would be the last person in the world that I would be close to, or her close to me. She used to say, "Jim's as common as an old shoe." That's not real flattering, I've got to admit that, but it's me. And I am just that. I am just that, and it's all I really want to be. I want to be someone you can talk to, you can reason with, that will move forward with. There are people here – many, many people here. But there's Mitch, there's Tim, there's another Tim, there's Roman. Those people I'm going to look at as friends. I'm going to trust them. I'm going to implore that somehow, we get together and make greatness work. There's no point in dividing ourselves between Republicans and Democrats and Independents. We are truly just West Virginians.

We've got a big hole. We have an incredible crisis. I give you, much improvement's been made and through the troubles of the coal industry and everything, it's amazing that we're still standing. But we've got a big job in front of us. It's going to be tough. I want to do this. I say this many times, but I want to just be Jimmy. Because, Jimmy is always nice. I can be Jim. And Jim will always be serious. But you really don't want to see James.

You wonder how tough are things, really? I've got to show you this. You see this tackle box? You see this old, broken-up ax? Now, think about this. On Memorial Day, Kathy and I were at the gravesite of my grandparents. We put out the flowers and cleaned the grave off. A lot of people there. And we were leaving. Down in Jesse, West Virginia. Not a very prosperous area these days. And as we were going across a little one-lane bridge, there was a lady standing there. Leaning up against the guardrail was this tackle box and ax, a pair of Carhartt coveralls, a Carhartt jacket, a camouflage jacket, and about six or eight fishing rods. She was selling her life away, her memories, to just maybe have enough money to have food. Now, listen, things are tough a lot of places. I carry this tackle box and this ax in my car every day because I want to remember her. And standing right beside her was her little daughter. I got out. And I'm ashamed of myself that I should've given her every dime that I had on me. I gave her \$100 for the tackle box and \$100 for the ax. She had no clue who I was. She looked at me with tears running down her face and said, "Mister, you don't have any idea how bad I'm hurting."

Now, we've got to do something. And we're going to. My dad would say, "Don't confuse effort with accomplishment." We've got to accomplish. You realize we're the bad end of a lot of jokes, and we've been that forevermore. I don't like it. I don't like the fact that we're fiftieth in everything coming or going. There had to be a reason why I ran for governor. The reason is really simple. I can't stand how good we are, and how troubled we are, and how many people are hurting. Now, let me tell you this. There's no question there's waste. And there's no question that we've got to do something about that. But we have to raise revenue. We have got to find a way to raise revenue. We cannot continue to just kick the can down the road, and drain more of the rainy day, and just continue to just kick the can because we're not going to go anywhere. Now, listen. I'm open to every idea, every new idea. And I'll be absolutely and stand open as I can possibly be to try to progress and move those ideas forward. I will lead. The next four years are going to be really something special. Whether you like it or not like it, but Donald Trump is our president. And let me just tell you this. I'm friends with the Trump family. I know them. I know them well. And I truly believe that he will provide us some opportunities within West Virginia as well.

Now, to be more specific, let me just say this. We all know. We all know what we've got to have. We've got to have jobs. We've got to have hope. We've got to have opportunity. Let me just tell you. If I were to be as specific as I could possibly be, here's what I would say. We have a drug epidemic that is absolutely cannibalizing us. And whatever we have to do to stop it, we have to do. If we don't, we're gone. The other thing is just this. In education today, our teachers, like it or not like it, are underpaid. Now, we've got to do something about it. Do you know we've got 600 classrooms in this state that we can't even field a teacher. We've got to get the bureaucrats out of the way. We've got to worry about our kids getting an A through F verses our schools getting an A through F. We've got to listen to the people who are on the ground, instead of trying to administer from Charleston when we don't have a clue what's going on and we have proven, we have proven how to be last.

But today, today, I have an education plan right here that I'm going to submit immediately for people to review. It's going to be the elimination of a bunch of unnecessary agencies. It's going

to be a look at education in a different way that has never been looked at for a long, long, long time. Do you realize, I think, maybe in about 1980, we had 500,000 students in schools. Today I think we have 277,000. In 1980 we had a 130 bureaucrats looking over 500,000 students. Today we have half as many students, and ten times as many bureaucrats looking over them. How can it possibly be? How can is possibly work? And we know it's not. We've got to do something about it.

Let me say this. Coal and gas are the 800-pound gorillas in the room. I truly believe, and I'm going to request, that we tier the severance tax on coal and gas both in this way: when the companies are really hurting, I say we try to help. But on the other hand, when the companies are really winning, we've got to get more, too. I think there's a real opportunity to bring furniture manufacturing back to our state. I'm going to go to Senator Manchin, and Senator Capito, and president-elect Donald Trump, and I'm going to propose an environmental subsidy. That basically says just this: if you cut a tree in Elkins, West Virginia, and you roll that log on a truck, emissions go into the air. But do you have any clue what these trees are doing to clean our air? 77 percent of our state is forested. We only cut a third of our growth. You realize something else? I'm a farmer. I know something about this stuff. I'm an ag guy. You know if you cut that log, and you dry keel it, and you make it into this right here, the carbon that it took up is still in this. Do you know if that log falls on the ground and a forest fire comes along, the carbon is released right back into the atmosphere? What our trees are doing for this world is unbelievable, and I'm going to propose an environmental subsidy that basically will pay us a percentage of our wages back on any product made out of hard woods. It could very well bring many, many, many manufacturing jobs to our great state.

We all know our roads are hurting, don't we? I'll promise you just this. Now this one may sound a little difficult, but some way, somehow, I've got to come up with \$225 million dollars of monies that's not anywhere today. That doesn't mean we have to tax you, we just gotta figure it out. Then here's what I'll do. I told many people on the campaign trail, there's a way to get things going with no money. The way is this – and whether it be the tolls or whatever it may be, I've gotta come up with a bucket that's equivalent to \$125 dollars per living human in West Virginia. That doesn't mean I'm going to tax you in any way, shape, form, or fashion, but I've gotta come up with \$225 million dollars and here's what I'm going to do with it.

I'm gonna turn and take it and use the multiplier of 15 years or 20 years or 25 years at low, low interest rates we have today, turn it into \$4.5 billion, put it into a financial instrument and sell it to Goldman Sachs, or J.P. Morgan or whoever it may be. You see, I know this stuff. I'm going to let them present-value it and give it back to us. It may only come back at \$1.4 million – or billion – that's a lot of money. And then what I'm gonna do is I'm gonna turn right around and I'm gonna take that \$1.4 billion and I'm gonna put it with as many highway matching dollars as I can. You can absolutely begin highway construction in this state tomorrow – tomorrow – like you can't imagine. And for every billion dollars of work that we do, it creates 25,000 new jobs. That's what we've gotta do.

Tourism will explode. It's right at our fingertips. All we have to do is market ourselves. You know and I know too, every time you turn the TV on it says, "Come to Michigan! Come to Michigan!" Who in the world wants to go to Michigan? I mean, it's like, I'll tell you what let's do, let's get a bus together and go to Detroit. Are you out of your mind? We've got to market ourselves. We've got to put real dollars into tourism and marketing and market ourselves.

Now, let me end by just saying this. West Virginia cannot wait. If you want somebody who's just gonna sit around and do nothing, you don't want me. It would drive me completely crazy. We don't need to be a third-world country that our resources leave us, and we are standing there holding the bag. We've proven that. We've got to solve the riddle. Now, let me just say, I'm a coach. I've said many times, close your eyes and imagine a place that had four of the most beautiful seasons in the world and was located within 600 miles of two-thirds of the people, and also had the most abounding resources on the planet, and on top of that had you, our craftsmen, faith-based, family, good people, and then say that place was West Virginia. Well, I'm gonna take it one step further. Imagine a place where the future of our schools were the very best. And imagine a place where West Virginia was known as the world's destination to come to for tourism. Imagine our workers – whether they be miners or whomever – back to work. And imagine our roads and bridges were the state of the art. And imagine that we had a niche crop. It may be just as simple as I've said many times, have you ever tasted a tomato that came out of a grocery store that tasted anything like a tomato that comes out of your grandma's garden? You haven't, have you? You know why? Because of our soils, our climate, our waters, it's making that happen. It makes that happen in Idaho to potatoes, or in Vidalia, Georgia to Vidalia onions. We've got to identify our crop and then market it right up the road to that two-thirds of the people.

The last thing I'd say is just this: I love kids and I love to see young people at work, and I hate it to my soul to see Grandma Edith that wants to have a picnic this coming Sunday, and she can't have it because she wants her grandkids to be there, and they're in Charlotte and Denver and Atlanta because they had to leave to go get a job. We need to provide a place for our young people who want to stay, have the opportunity to stay.

The last that I'll say, and I say this as profound as anything could ever be said. We can do it. We can do it. We will do it. It's time for us to claim our place, and if it takes this hatchet, I'll carry the hatchet. It's time for West Virginia to claim their place. It is truly West Virginia's time. God bless you. Thank you for having me.